

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

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ANTECHINAL ANTICS

Last year I intended to write about an antechinus who lives with us for a good part of the year. I should amend that to 'parts of the year' and its choice of seasons is difficult to explain. It was around in the winter, and returned about two months ago for the summer. As I have suspected for some time there are at least two of these delightful little animals inhabiting a spot somewhere in the bedroom/study roof. I am concerned that they may have settled on the neatly boxed area around the flue for a nesting site, which could become a little too cosy in the winter.

We have learned many signs that distinguish the presence of this yellow-footed antechinus (*Antechinus flavipes*) from that of a mere house-mouse (*Mus domesticus*), apart from the fact that we have almost daily close-up viewings of this attractive and inquisitive creature, with its long nose and apricot ears.

One sign is its ability to ascend vertical surfaces - up the door of the kitchen cupboard, a quick check around the dirty dinner dishes for any nice meaty left-overs, another quick check on top of the gas stove, and then straight down its smooth enamel surface to the floor. This last descent is somewhat precipitous, and it fell/jumped the last 12". A leap onto an empty milk carton sitting on the floor, then down and into the pantry and up among the mouse-proof shelves, from whence it gazes at us from the top of the Fowler's jars. I've never found mouse droppings on these shelves - only the larger antechinus ones, and they don't have an offensive smell. This is the size.

Another favourite hunting place is our bedroom/study - a sleepout, really, visited by many insects, the occasional skink and a nocturnal bat or two. There is no need for me to clean the window ledges and other surfaces of dead flies; either the skink or the antechinus take on that house-keeping task, and we have laid in bed watching, and listening to, the antechinus stop and crunch on many a dead fly. It also takes leaps up the window, trying to catch live ones, and generally frolics around the clere-story windows (about 12' up), almost airborne.

That window ledge is one route to its 'nest'. The other is along inside the roof where it sounds as if it is practising for the Olympics. Back and forth with enormous rapidity, and considerable noise for such a delicate animal.

Sometimes it clings and swings on the cloth hanging that divides the study area from the bedroom, and peers down at the children watching T.V.

It leads a hazardous life, however. We have no cats, but a Tawny Frogmouth visits regularly at night, and I hate to it, but at times of high mouse infestations I have resorted to putting down mouse bait. Among the many dead mice I have never found a dead antechinus, but it is always a risk, especially to my peace of mind. I hope that its carnivorous preferences protect it. The other hazard, to it and to us, is the fact that its track from bedroom to kitchen is along the electric wires under the eaves. Last winter when sparks were flying during rain, we discovered that its continual passage using a wire as a foothold had worn away the covering, exposing the bare wire.

When we first moved into this house it had been uninhabited by humans for a few months, and a brush-tailed phascogale also appeared to be living here. It was apparently too shy to remain, but the antechinus tolerates us quite happily; indeed, I think the interest is mutual.

Clodagh Norwood



JOYS OF SUMMER

On a recent delicious, balmy, summer evening I was out in the front garden when I noticed a couple of teenagers on the grass verge across the road. They were with their parents, and all were engaged in a lively conversation. Although I couldn't understand what they were discussing I was really impressed by their relaxed, friendly manner as they tried to out-warble the other. They completely ignored every passing car. After a good ten minutes one of the parents suddenly screeched, "My goodness! Look at the time!" - and off they all flew!

Maggie Oliver

NAME CHANGE FOR CASTLEMAINE FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INC?

Should we go historical, and change the name of our club to the "Castlemaine Field Rambler's Club Inc"? If so, we could claim that the club was in existence in 1895!

On the other hand, it ceased functioning after a time, a fate not desirable for the present club.

What do you think?

BUTTERFLIES OF CASTLEMAINE

[This article is reprinted from the "Victorian Naturalist" vol 12, Number 8, 1895. Thanks to Kevin Walsh for supplying the article. It is interesting that the Eltham copper butterfly is included, (under the old name, *Chrysophanus anea*), with the note "a few specimens seen in Botanical Gardens last summer. Two males captured".

THE FAUNA OF CASTLEMAINE DISTRICT— BUTTERFLIES.

By F. L. BILLINGHURST,

President of the Castlemaine Field Ramblers' Club.

Communicated by T. S. HALL, M.A.

(Read before the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria, 14th October, 1895.)

I ONCE knew a gentleman in Cape Colony who was an ardent naturalist. He lived for some years in a small town on the coast—a veritable naturalist's paradise—and during his residence there had made large collections of the insect fauna of the neighbourhood, and worked hard at the natural history of the district generally. He was the first, and for a long time the only, naturalist who had visited the place. After I made his acquaintance I often used to say it was a pity he did not give the world the benefit of his researches, either by writing a book or by records sent to scientific journals; but he obstinately refused to do so, or even to make notes. His argument was that he had had to work things out for himself, and had done it for his own pleasure, and he did not see why anyone else should benefit by his labours. After a time circumstances occurred which caused him to remove to an inland town some forty miles distant, and his collections were piled with his other goods and chattels on the orthodox ox waggon for removal, and then Nemesis overtook him and overturned the waggon while crossing a drift, and his splendid collection was utterly ruined, and his years of labour virtually lost. It seems to me, however, that my friend's case is by no means an isolated one. Take our Victorian fauna, for instance. Until the last two or three years our general records were very few in number, consisting, I think, of the lists of mammals, birds, and snakes published in the first, and Mr. J. H. Gatliff's list of the marine mollusca published in the fourth and fifth volumes of the *Victorian Naturalist*. Now we have Messrs. Lucas and Frost's list of the lizards, and Mr. Lucas's

list of the fish, in the "Royal Society's Proceedings;" Messrs. Anderson and Spry's excellent work on the "Victorian Butterflies," Mr. O. Lower's splendid list of the Victorian moths now appearing in your journal, and the revised lists of the Victorian mammals and birds recently published in the *Geelong Naturalist*.

These are all steps in the right direction; but I was taught in England that local lists were of greater scientific interest than general lists, and, besides, the latter could always be compiled from them. So, when I settled down in Castlemaine, I determined to work away at the local fauna, and after a while offer the results of my work to your society for record in your journal, if you should feel disposed to accept them.

From the outset I have been met by two difficulties. Firstly, the time I am able to devote to the subject is limited; and secondly, and this is the most serious, the difficulty I have experienced in getting my specimens identified. My opportunities of visiting the Melbourne Museum are few and very far between, and what descriptions there are of Victorian fauna are spread over a mass of periodical and other literature unobtainable or beyond my reach. Thanks, however, to the extreme kindness of Mr. C. Hedley (of Sydney) and Messrs. Lower and Blackburn (of Adelaide) my Mollusca, Lepidoptera, and a goodly number of the Coleoptera have their distinguishing names pinned over them. My list of land and freshwater shells you have already been good enough to record (*Victorian Naturalist*, vol. x., p. 61), and I now propose to give a list of the butterflies I have met with so far. Of course my lists cannot be looked upon as complete—since I recorded the shells I have found two more species—but still they go some way towards a permanent record of what is to be found here, and some time later I will give a supplementary list of subsequent finds.

Castlemaine, as you are aware, is a little north of the Dividing Range. It is not a first-class collecting ground. The hills are comparatively bare of undergrowth and the shrubs on which insects delight to feed; there are very few eucalypts of any size in the immediate neighbourhood—nothing but saplings, too thin for the trunks to be any good and yet too tall to get at the tops. Coming from a country like South Africa, where from an area of about four square miles I had taken 98 species of butterflies alone, I was disappointed when I first came here. However, I have obtained a fair number of insects of the various orders, and hope to do better yet. My hunting ground extends to Harcourt and Mount Alexander to the north, Chewton and Elphinstone to the east, Muckleford to the west, and Guildford and Fryerstown to the south. I do not think, from what I can learn, that the district has ever been worked for insects before, but I have met

with but little new. However, that does not matter much. I would only remark here that I shall be thankful to enter into correspondence with any specialist during the coming summer, and now proceed with my list :—

Terias smilax.—Not uncommon in spring. Took several on Maldon railway line, October, 1894.

Pieris leutonia.—Common in December. I have seen two distinct travelling flocks since I have been here, each time going due west. Transit of flock in each case occupied a whole day.

Delias aganippe.—Fairly common round tops of trees.

Delias harpalyce.—Not so frequent as last.

Danaus petilia.—A few specimens seen on Maldon railway line in October.

Danaus erippus.—One specimen seen in my garden. This seems to be the *Danaus chrysippus* of the Cape, which is mimicked there by the female of *Diadema bolina*.

Xenica achantia.—Common on Mount Alexander.

Xenica Klugii.—Very common everywhere, December and January.

Heteronympha merope.—Our commonest fly.

Pyrameis itea.—Frequent, but not nearly so common as on the coast.

Junonia vellida.—Fairly frequent. I once came across a little waterhole in a gully, in November, around which they simply swarmed.

Lucia lucanus.—Fairly frequent on open grassy spots.

→ *Chrysophanus cenea*.—A few specimens seen in Botanical Gardens last summer. Two males captured. ELTHAM COPPER (OLD NAME)

Lampides baclicus.—Fairly common in November round Cape Broom.

Lycema biocellata.—One specimen taken at Expedition Pass Reservoir.

Lycema labradus.—Very common.

Lycema agricola.—Common in bush in October and November.

Holochila erinus.—One specimen taken on hills south of Chewton.

Ialmenus evagoras.—Common in a few localities, but very local.

Ialmenus inous.—One specimen taken at Expedition Pass Reservoir.

Trapezites phillyra.—Common in spring.

Hesperilla lutea.—Messrs. Anderson and Spry do not give this name, which I obtained from Mr. Lower. I have taken only one specimen, and that rather old.

Taructrocera papyria.—A few specimens taken at Expedition Pass Reservoir, in long grass, November.

ROADSIDE CONSERVATION IN THE MALDON SHIRE

This article describes some of the observations made during roadside surveys in the Maldon Shire.

BULL OAK. Bull oak (*Allocasuarina luehmannii*) is listed as a rare or endangered plant for Victoria, because its range is now very much more restricted than before European settlement, and it is regenerating very poorly. We found it to be quite common on some stretches of road, and often with dense stands of small plants.

Some of the roads with bull oak include the Baringhup-Carisbrook Road, Havelock Road (between Kayes Road and the Back Eddington Road), along the Back Eddington Road, along the Maldon-Bridgewater Road just NW of Bells Swamp, and along the Baringhup West Road.

BULL OAK MISTLETOE is another endangered plant. None was seen along roadsides, but there is a fine example inside a paddock along the Baringhup West Road, between O'Keefes Road and the Baringhup West-Eastville Road.

TWISTED GREY BOX. Two beautiful old twisted grey box were found on Shield (McLeish) Road. This road is south of Lovelands Crossing. A good camera study.

WEeping PITTOSPORUM. *Pittosporum phillyreoides* was found on Lakey's Road, about 1.5 km north of Bells Swamp. This would be a new record for North Central Area sector I.

VARNISH WATTLE. *Acacia verniciflua* was found at Smiths Reef. A new records for this forest.

DAM. A large dam on the west side of Ottreys Scrub Road (makes a T intersection with Lewis Road) had a fine assortment of water birds. Best visited in the morning.

MYSTERY WATTLE. *Acacia difformis* along the track to Muckleford forest was in flower in late January, and a few flowers were still present at the end of February. The track leads from the Castlemaine - Maldon Road about a kilometre before the Gower School.

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to our Club's vice president, Maggie Oliver, who has been appointed local representative for the Castlemaine area by the Bird Observers Club of Australia.

MALDON SHIRE ROADSIDE CONSERVATION

Many Club members have been taking part in roadside conservation assessment for a variety of shires. As well, Castlemaine F.N.C. has carried out a survey of the roads in the Maldon Shire.

Thanks to those who took part, and to those who offered to assist. More Club members offered to assist than room could be found for.

The results are preliminary, and further surveys will no doubt be needed in many of the areas. A map of the shire showing roads classified as of low, medium or high conservation value has been prepared.

NOTES FOR FEBRUARY

BLACK FALCON has been reported for North Harcourt by Rita Mills.

WEDGE-TAILED EAGLE was seen low over the Calder Hwy at the Belvoir Park turn-off on 14 Feb, by M. Oliver.

BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE was seen over the Castlemaine town hall on 19th Feb, by Rita Mills.

OWLET NIGHTJARS were seen on the track past the railway dam (Fryers Ridge) by G. Broadway and at Fryerstown (Clodagh Norwood).

BLUE WRENS have been making daily visits to M. Olivers garden in Gaulton St.

FROGMOUTH at Castlemaine North has a family of three young this year (R. Mills)

DARTER was seen on Harcourt North reservoir by E & L Perkins on 7 Feb, and on the dam in Ottreys Scrub Road by and E Perkins and K Turner on 8 Feb.

NANKEEN KESTRELS were reported to be very numerous in the Baringhup district, between the Loddon River and Tullaroop Creek (K Turner and E, Perkins, 8 Feb)

GALAHS at Castlemaine North have had three broods at Castlemaine North. This lot show little fear of people (R Mills)

POWERFUL OWL is nesting near Guildford (B Perry)

WATER BIRDS including an Australian Grebe and chicks have been seen on the regeneration dam at Wattle Gully (C. Norwood).

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

Fri 8 Mar. KINGDOM OF THE LYREBIRD. Video by Laslo and Jeny Erdos. 8.00 p.m. at the High School

Sat 9 Mar. TOUR OF MALDON SHIRE. A chance to see some of the Maldon Shire roads. Leave 27 Doveton St at 11.00 am. Lunch on Loddon River (over river from Baringhup caravan park). Take binoculars for some bird watching.

Thur 21 Mar. BUSINESS MEETING. 7 pm at 38 Campbell St.
Note change of date.

Fri 12 Apr. THE AMAZON with Felix Cappy. 8 pm at the High School.

Sat 13 Apr. Mt CAMERON CROSSING. Not on the Amazon, but a 3-4 km walk along Tullaroop Creek. Leader R Mills. 1.30 p.m. at SEC, Mostyn St.

Fri 14 June. FROGS with Tom Burton.

Sat 14 Sept. LAURISTON WILDFLOWERS. To be confirmed

Sun 6 Oct. MUCKLEFORD FOREST with Ballarat F.N.C.

Sun 20 Oct. MALDON STEAM TRAIN WILDFLOWER TRIP. Date of Bendigo Native Plant Group tour. 1 p.m. at Maldon RS.

Sat 9 Nov. TIPPERARY SPRINGS. Walk from the springs to Twin Bridges. Leader R. Mills. 1.30 pm at SEC, Mostyn Street. Leader R. Mills.

Meetings on the second Friday of each month (Jan excepted) at Castlemaine High School at 8.00 p.m. Business meetings on the fourth Thursday at 38 Campbell St at 7.30 p.m. All members are invited to attend.

Visitors are invited to attend the Club's sessions.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc
P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine 3450

Committee: Ern Perkins (Pres), Chris Norwood (V. Pres), Maggie Oliver (V. Pres), Barbara Maund (Sec), Clodagh Norwood (Treas), Kaye Turner, George Broadway, Rita Mills (Newsletter), Enid Hall and Brenda Envall.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Student/Pensioner	\$7	Single	\$10
Supporting	\$20	Family	\$15
Newsletter posted: Subscription plus \$6			

SUPPER Mar 8: E Hall & P Shaw Apr 12: M & R Holden